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# Peter Fosselman is a mayor with many hats

Washington Business Journal - by [Mara Lee](#) Contributing Writer

Kensington Mayor Peter Fosselman, first elected in 2006, has had both accomplishments and obstacles on his goal to revitalize the 115-year-old Montgomery County suburb with about 2,000 residents. He's an entrepreneur and urban planner as well as a politician. He talked with us about how Kensington is changing.

**Why did you want to become mayor?** I wanted to get more involved in the community and some of the residents actually came to me and asked me to run. They were unhappy with the current administration and just wanted a fresh face. I ran on a platform of revitalization. I apparently fit the ticket — I beat an incumbent council member with 74 percent of the vote. Residents want to be able to stay at home, do more things around town, have more of a walkable community, not have to get in the car to go Bethesda or Silver Spring.

**The downtown section of Kensington didn't allow liquor licenses when you were first elected. When did that change?** On Oct. 1, 2007, as one of two bills. It established (liquor licenses) on Antiques Row, which allowed restaurants to open up and serve liquor. One of the problems with the [town's] economics was there were no restaurants. You want foot traffic, you want people, you need restaurants to [lure] other retail uses. And then the other law we had changed at a state level, we sort of got a quasi-zoning authority. We didn't have the ability to say no. Now we do.

**Was that difficult?** The town was almost 100 percent supportive, and the county council supported it, the county executive supported it. It passed unanimously in the state senate. It took 22 trips to Annapolis, though, on my part, to get it done, meeting with different people.

**How many hours a week do you spend on your mayoral duties?** My first term — they're two-year terms — I probably spent about 50 hours a week, and it's supposed to be part time. My second term, which started last summer, I probably spend about 25 hours working.

**Tell me your career path.** I was with Rodgers Consulting earlier in my career, and then left, and started a small fitness center, Sweatshop Fitness. It's across the street from the train station. It's five years old. My domestic partner Duane Rollins started a restaurant in September 2007 called 1894, that's the year the town was founded.

**Are you involved in the restaurant?** You'll find me there clearing tables occasionally, or helping people — or washing dishes, actually. Not much any more because I don't have the time between the gym, Rodgers and the town. I did at the beginning. I was behind the counter, I was in the kitchen. Only the first maybe two months, if that.

**You returned to Rodgers Consulting a year ago. How do you spend your days there?** I'm a principal for the firm, we do civil engineering, urban planning, landscape design. I sort of interact between the engineering and planning departments. What put us on the map is the Kentlands, back in 1988, and that was a good 10-year project. I became the project manager in 1994 for Kentlands.

**Did the old Kensington inspire your work at Kentlands?** If anything, some of the things that have been done in Kentlands have inspired some of the changes in Kensington. Mixed use, walkable community, safer pedestrian situations.

**Is it hard to attract boutiques and restaurants because Bethesda is so close?** I'm getting a lot of positive feedback. We have — and I won't say who they are — we have a very well-known local family who owns five restaurants in the area, who live in Kensington and they would like to open up a restaurant, and it's a very nice restaurant, sit-down. We also have some interest from some property owners in town, looking at more residential units, maybe some condos or cottages. There's definitely energy and interest.

**What's happening with the Victorian Warner Circle Mansion?** That was founded by Brainard Warner, who was the father of the town. He had founded the town and a lot of people who worked in Washington bought second homes here. The town centered around the railroad. His was sort of the center, and obviously one of the largest homes. The county owns it. We went through a request for proposals process last year and that failed. It was for a public-private relationship, we were hoping to get some kind of private investor. The biggest hurdle is the building itself requires a couple of million dollars to renovate. So it was hard to find a partner to do that. It needs all this structural and fire code work on the interior. The next step was a public use. At this point, we are still working with Park and Planning. It could possibly be some county offices.

**How would you like to change the Victorian train station in town, now used for commuter rail?** It's all preliminary. I used to work for the city of Gaithersburg, and the mayor and town manager were instrumental in getting control of the B&O line train station up there, and renovating it, turning it into a coffee store/ice cream shop, yet still having a waiting room for the commuters.

**Is Gaithersburg's train station also Victorian?** It's almost the same model. It's a little smaller than ours. We have a great farmer's



Peter Fosselman

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market on Saturdays. Maybe that warehouse area on the side that's not used as much could be used for the farmer's market during the winter. The train station is still very much in use. We did our own counts, we had as many as 200 per day use it.

**Why do you love Kensington?** I have two dogs. I walk my dogs all over the place. And I really like people stopping and talking. Everybody knows everybody. It's just really nice to be able to do that. It's a different feel. I've lived in other neighborhoods in Virginia and Maryland and never lived in an area like this where you can actually stop and talk to people.

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